Shigenaga's Helmet

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Shigenaga's Helmet

by Cadaverish

Summary

Will has been arrested on suspicion of murder. In defense of the police, they are entirely correct.

Notes

Thank you ever so much for you patience with this last part! This is the first time a work I've done has hit 50k words, who knew it would be freaky weird ghost sex? Thank you all for reading this freaky weird thing!

See the end of the work for more notes

Will stared into the two-way mirror behind the police officer. He felt confident the police wouldn't be able to find conclusive proof that he had killed those teenagers. But "I don't know what happened to seven people who broke into the house I've been studying closely" rang false.

The officer hadn't actually said anything yet. He was just doing paperwork at the little table between them, occasionally humming over something, glancing at Will, and then back at the paper. It was classic and intellectually Will knew exactly what he was doing, but still he felt anxiety welling up within him. Will tried hard not to fidget but he knew he looked uncomfortable.

No, his mind whispered, you look guilty.

He looked at himself in the mirror behind the officer. Pale, deep dark grooves dipped into the skin below his eyes. His lips were drawn tight and thin. He tried to soften the lines of his face and relax the muscles that made him appear so nervous, and promptly startled backwards when Hannibal's image appeared behind him in the mirror.

Hannibal smiled and shushed him with a finger to his lips. He looked immaculate in a blue suit. It was the clearest Will had seen him since last night. He wondered when sunrise was, desperate to hold onto this single piece of solace in the little interrogation room. Hannibal was signing to him. Will dimly remembered some of the signs as letters in the alphabet from a speaker in grade school, but couldn't interpret them further than that.

Hannibal frowned, not unkindly, and then got the thoughtful expression he always did before something extraordinary happened. Fog swirled up behind the mirror and Hannibal tried writing on the mirror in the cloud but it faded too fast. Will wondered why Hannibal wouldn't just speak into his mind as he had before, perhaps he could only appear physically within the confines of his own house.

The officer turned, looking into the mirror to try to see what Will was looking at. Inexplicably, Will felt a bone deep certainty that the officer could not and would never be able to. Hannibal sighed and Will frowned apologetically.

The mirror went blank but for the reflection of the room and the familiar feeling of Hannibal's presence swept over him. His back straightened, his shoulders squared, he felt the assurance of muscle that did not actually exist. "I don't want to talk to you," he said clearly and Will wondered how it was that Hannibal's accent, now that he had heard it, didn't come into his words spoken through Will's mouth, "I want a lawyer."

The officer frowned and said something condescending. He stood from the chair and left the room. Will gave a small smile to the mirror.

Will was given the number of the public defender's office and left alone with a phone and notepad emblazoned with a domestic violence help group's logo. The public defender told him he had too much money to qualify and gave him a few referrals. Will contemplated the scrawled list of names before him. He supposed he could ask for a court-appointed attorney.

He felt paralyzed by indecision. For all that Hannibal was with him, there was no mirror in the room and Will couldn't see or feel him. His hand drifted to the planchette around his neck.

His breathing was slowing down when a knock came at the door. Will started violently and rose to a wide legged stance, the chair beneath him toppling and skidding away. The door opened slowly, giving him plenty of time to see the person on the other side.

The open door revealed a woman, well into her seventies by Will's perception, but straight backed and regal. She wore a dark suit and leaned on a dark cane and her snow white hair was gathered up and stuck through with dark pins. Will stared, shaking in place.

"Mr. Graham?" she asked in a rich, low voice.

"Yeah," he agreed warily.

She stepped into the room and shut the door quietly. "My name is Margot Verger." She pronounced the name carefully, giving him plenty of time to absorb it. "I heard you were arrested at Hannibal Lecter's house."

"At Dr. Lecter's house yeah," Will bent to pick up the chair, his nerves starting to calm down from their state of white hot surprise.

"I'm an attorney," she told him, watching him set the chair to rights, "and I'd like to represent you."

"For old time's sake?" Will asked sardonically, leaning awkwardly on the chair because it seemed impolite to just sit down again and even more awkward to just stand there.

"Call it returning a favor." Margot corrected him. "Have they told you the charges?"

"Criminal trespass," Will told her, "but if their CSI team is efficient and lucky, maybe homicide."

Her gaze sharpened on him, Will imagined he could feel her stare cutting into him. "Alright let's get you some confidentiality." She said and walked to the little table. From her satchel she produced three forms, one of which accepted Will as her client and the other of which informed him he ought to pay her. "I'm doing this pro-bono," she said as he glanced at the latter, "so don't worry. This is just a formality. This last lets me appear on your behalf at the bail hearing."

"Thank you," he said, voice very small indeed. She smiled then, the first smile he had seen from her. It didn't warm her face the way smiles did for most people.
Knowing that made him like her more.

"Alright, what don't I know" she asked, pulling the chair to her side of the room and sitting elegantly. Will leaned against the table.

"It's possible a friend visited me before she went missing. And it's possible the police expect to find evidence of those seven missing teenagers-"

“The Major General’s son?” Margot asked, raising a hand to pause him.

“Among others,” Will agreed.

“Are they going to find anything?” Margot asked him.

“I hope not,” Will muttered, then amended “I don’t think so.”

“We’ll deal with that if it happens,” Margot told him smoothing a crease from the fabric of her skirt and standing.

“The police aren’t going to release you just yet.” Margot said bluntly, “are you going to be okay out of the house?”

Will hesitated far too long, peering at her as if something in her gaze might help him divine if she was going to have him committed if he told her the truth. “Are there mirrors in the cells?” he asked finally.

“Behind heavy plastic, yes,” she agreed warily.

“Then I’ll be alright.” Will promised, slumping against the table. Margot’s gaze didn’t so much as flicker, she simply nodded and turned towards the door. Will stopped her, asking “but can I get my notes?”

“Your notes?”

“I was working on my thesis before I was, uh, arrested.”

“You’re a student?” Margot asked, arching one immaculately penciled eyebrow fractionally.

“Criminology. Graduating in a few weeks, maybe.” Will said, chagrined.

“Of course you are.” Margot said, smiling her razor blade smile again. She went on, “Not yet. I hope to get you out of jail soon, but if things are drawn out I’ll see what I can do about your notes. I’ll only be a little while. Do you need anything?”

For a moment, Will sincerely contemplated asking if she had a makeup mirror. But he made himself shake his head no and watch her silently as she stepped back through the door and shut it behind her.

Will contemplated the shitty notepad with the lawyer’s names on it. Abruptly he tore off the top page and wrote out an alphabet on the page below with yes, no, hello, and goodbye at the corners.

He took off his necklace and set the planchette on the page.

“If Hannibal is here, I’d like to speak with him.” He said aloud. The planchette drifted slowly to ‘hello’. Will hoped it was him.

“I didn’t know you could leave the house,” Will said, “I mean your real you, I knew you could sort of move stuff at school and the store that one time.” He waited, chewing his knuckles.

Palpable relief swept over him the moment the planchette moved. He had seen Hannibal in the mirror and he knew he was there, even when he was just air currents and arbitrary cell phone signal he had known. But it was good when everything was completely fucked up to reach out and have someone else reach back.

ITS HARD the planchette spelled out.

“Does it tire you out? You can go!” Will assured him, alarmed. The planchette slid to ‘no’, then began spelling again: LIKE UNDERWATER.

“I was happy to meet Margot,” Will told him, “I’m glad she’s alive.”

ME TOO answered the planchette, circling the O so he knew Hannibal was obeying the laws of grammar even like this. Will laughed, feeling the crippling anxiety begin to ebb from his body.

“What did you end up doing about her brother?” he asked, curious.

YOULL SEE Hannibal wrote, again circling double letters. “Aw,” Will whined without conviction.

“Are the police there,” Will whispered. The planchette slid to ‘yes’ and Will tensed thinking about oblivious officers ransacking the beautiful old house.

Margot knocked softly on the door before she opened it and Will startled badly, tearing off the page with the makeshift Ouija alphabet as he stood and stuffing it ineffectively into the pocket of his jeans. Margot regarded his disarray blandly and stepped into the room without remarking.

“I have a meeting with the judge early tomorrow morning,” she told him tranquilly. “I hope to have your case dismissed by then, but I’m telling you now it’s a long shot.”

“Sure,” agreed Will. She looked at him sternly and then moved to leave. Will took a step forward to stop her and asked, “Ms. Verger, do you know who called the police?”

“The police report only mentioned a roommate of yours,” Margot said, “she requested a wellness check.”

Once more she turned to leave, and once again Will stopped her. He held up the planchette. “Would you keep this for me?” he asked, not daring to meet her eyes. Margot took it carefully and tucked it into her satchel. “I’ll get it back to you as soon as I can,” she promised solemnly. “Thank you,” Will said, on the brink of tears for her sincere nonjudgement.

Finally she left, soon replaced by a harried looking blonde officer and a bald man with a thousand yard stare. Both wore police uniforms and one held a pair of cuffs.
Will allowed himself to be cuffed and lead to booking where he was photographed,

fingerprinted, stripped, and redressed in flattering orange polyester. With his hands handcuffed to a stiff fabric belt and his ankles chained together, he was lead to a narrow cell. As Margot had promised, there was a dirty mirror on the wall behind hard plastic.

He sat quietly while the officers uncuffed him, staring hard at the mirror, and barely noticed when they had gone.

-x-

“Who’s the new guy?” Marty asked, face pressed against the wall of his cell. “Some kinda narcissist,” Leland answered balling up his ninth attempt at an origami horse.

“Yeah?” Marty prodded.

“Been starin’ into the mirror since he got here,” Leland confirmed, fishing out another piece of origami paper, “nearly five hours now.”

“Got anything to stare at?” Marty’s question had something icky behind it and Leland scrunched his face in disgust.

“Fuck would I know,” Leland grunted.

Marty heard his disgust and cackled. Leland glanced at the observation window. Their cells all faced the wall of the hallway, but the guard’s room was faced with a window that looked over the row of cells and when the guards had the lights down he could see his neighboring cells reflected in the glass.

The new guy was staring back at him. Leland looked away so fast he felt something twinge in his neck. He made another fold. Hesitantly, he lifted his gaze back to the window. New guy was still right where he’d been staring balefully at Leland’s reflection in the window.

“You some kinda freak?” Leland barked, covering his nerves with aggression. New guy tilted his head as if considering him, but didn’t answer.

“What’s he in for?” Marty asked from the next cell over, his voice was sly and slippery. Marty was what the guards called “a frequent flyer”.

“Murder,” answered the new guy, just loud enough to be heard. “Ten people,” he paused a few beats too long before adding, “they say.”

Even Marty didn’t have a smart ass comment for that, he was just an enterprising narcotics dealer, he didn’t get into wet work like the boys in Baltimore proper. Leland was staring so hard at his origami horse sweat was beading on his forehead. New guy was still staring, he knew it without looking up again.

“You kill ‘em?” Marty asked, voice small.

New guy stared a moment longer before smiling, an awful smile that twisted his face to one side without touching his eyes, and turned away from the window. He drifted over to his cot, reflection becoming ghostly as he went further from the window. Leland fervently hoped they

were being ignored instead of threatened, he could only see the soles of new guy's rubber jail shoes.

He went back to his horse. Marty was quiet, probably reading the porno mag he'd had smuggled in. Leland finished the horse, standing it carefully beneath the metal frame of the bed along with the butterfly, the owl, and the elephant. He was finally tired so he lay back on the cot, but before he shut his eyes, he glanced back at the guard room window, and promptly shot back up.

In the window was still the reflection of new guy's shoes, nothing else in the dim light of his cell, but the reflection was a good foot above the frame of the cot. Leland didn't dare say anything, fists knotted up in the coarse bedsheets.

"Marty," he whispered, voice shuddering, but Marty was asleep and nobody answered. Leland curled towards the wall of the cell, face pressed into his hands, and tried to sleep.

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The next morning, Will was walked from his cell to a tiny meeting room and the chain of his handcuffs was threaded through a ring bolted to the table inside and the cuffs refastened. Mere moments passed before Margot stepped into the room, and slid elegantly into the opposite chair.

"Please undo the handcuffs before you leave," she asked the guard and the guard grunted something about the procedure with homicide perps. Margot regarded him narrowly with her lips pressed into a severe line. "It's fine," Will mumbled. He had barely slept three hours but felt as if he'd slept nine.

Margot hesitated as she started digging into her satchel, and Will remembered the planchette. He smiled, trying to convey that he didn't need it without actually saying the words. Slowly, Margot shut the satchel again and set it on the floor by her heels.

"I can't get you out today," she told him, "but I put a fairly severe time cap on the prosecution. If you're correct that the CSI team won't find anything, I'll have you out, ideally, next week."

"Thank you," Will murmured, staring at his knuckles. Making eye contact with her, with anybody, felt overwhelming today.

Margot watched him quietly, gaze searching as if she expected Will to know the next line in the script. Will focused on a spot over her shoulder and shrugged helplessly. "You're doing alright in here?" Margot asked.

"Hasn't been much time at all," Will moderated.

"The guards reported strange behavior," Margot told him, "I wanted to make sure it was their idea of strange and not yours."

Will grinned at that, even managing to make eye contact for a few seconds. “No,” he said, “totally normal for me.”

Margot nodded, managing to be regal even in the little concrete and steel room with its horrible flickering fluorescents. It reminded Will of Hannibal and his serene elegance. “Your initial appearance will be tomorrow, do you want to authorize me to appear for you again? I will say,” she went on before he could respond, “I think it’s a good idea. You’re much more sympathetic as a collection of facts than you are in person.”

Will nodded seriously. He expected, in the back of his mind, other clients might be offended by that reasoning but he had been told over and over in the past few months how creepy he looked. To him he just looked how he had always looked but if everyone said so there might be something to it.

“I’ll sign,” he agreed, “have the prosecutors passed on anything um…” he tried to think of a word that wasn’t ‘incriminating’ but couldn’t so he went with it, “anything incriminating?”

“No,” said Margot firmly, selecting the attorney appearance form from the depths of her satchel and passing it across to him with, Will noticed with amusement, a paper pen of the kind that biodegraded in water. “Just that the Major General is breathing down everyone’s neck so this might be the fastest any crime scene has been processed in history.”

“I didn’t think they would,” Will said, signing and sliding the form and the pen back to her. The chain connecting the handcuffs scraped loudly against the ring in the table as he moved. He had been a little worried about any sounds Bedelia might make though. He hadn’t had time to make certain nobody could hear any screaming. Hannibal had been confident, though, and he supposed Hannibal would know better than anyone. Of course, Hannibal himself seemed to have significant control over what one could and could not perceive in the house.

Will noticed Margot had been watching him patiently as his mind wandered. “Oh uh, don’t you have um, other clients?” Will asked, his anxiety returning with a vengeance.

“No,” Margot smoothed an invisible crease from her trousers, “you’re my only client. I enjoy my retirement.”

“You came out of retirement for me?” Will felt unaccountably horrified. “Don’t people think that’s,” he dared to make enough eye contact to gauge her mood but as ever she was inscrutable, “well, weird?”

“No,” Margot assured him, “I take cases now and again you aren’t the first. Judy says I get cranky if I’ve been lazing about too long.” She saw Will’s expression before he asked and answered “Judy is my wife.”

“Oh,” said Will thoughtfully, “well thank you again.”

“You’re welcome,” said Margot, “I’d like to read your paper on Dr. Lecter, sometime.”

“You should visit, if I get out,” Will blurted out before he thought too hard about it, “after dark.”

“I would like that,” Margot agreed slowly. They sat in comfortable silence for a few more minutes before Margot rose to her feet. “I suppose we ought to return this room to the jail. I’m sorry to have to send you back to custody.”

“It’s been alright,” Will assured her watching her assemble her papers. He fidgeted, the chain of his handcuffs rattling cacophonously in the silent.

“If, at any point, it isn’t alright,” said Margot seriously, “you should call me.” She picked up the satchel and moved to the door. “Oh, and you should check you mail this afternoon.”

Then she was gone.

Will waited in silence for awhile, playing counting games in his head for want of anything to do, and finally a guard came to collect him. Morning had faded and Will returned to the cellblock to find it empty, and he was escorted to a pathetic central room with plastic tables supporting poker games and a flickering television dangling precariously from the wall.

The guard released him into the herd and Will realized he was being given a wide berth. The man from the cell next to him, in particular, seemed to be working hard to stay away from him.

That suited Will just fine.

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“You got mail, new guy” Marty said without provocation. Leland glanced at the window and saw him leaning bodily against the bars facing the hallway. It was his bored posture and a sure sign that some kind of mischief was forthcoming.

The new guy hadn’t responded. He was sitting cross legged on his cot, both hands resting on a sheet of paper on his bed.

“Can’t you read, new guy?” Marty called, his stupid grin pressed out of shape by the drag of his cheek on the bars, “you won’t learn just by staring at it for hours.” Leland fought back the urge to shush him.

“Oh,” said the new guy in a faint, dreamy voice, “I was sure that was how it worked.”

Marty wasn’t sure what to do when sarcasm was thrown back at him. Leland narrowed his eyes, trying to shut out any awareness of the guy in the cell next door, and live only in the next squash fold in his sun bear.

“Who wrote you, girlfriend?” Marty’s obnoxious rasp cut through his focus like it always did, no matter how long Leland was stuck next to him.

“Sure,” agreed the new guy, dismissively.

“She send you a dirty letter?” Marty prodded, tugging at the neck of his jumpsuit. New guy ignored him so Marty did what he knew best and that was annoying people. Question after question, asking the new guy to describe his girlfriend, how he liked her in bed, if she got

freaky with him, on and on. It was so constant Leland even managed to ignore him as white noise, returning to the tranquility of absolute focus delicate origami required from his stubby fingers.

Abruptly, Marty went silent. Leland, against his better judgment, looked up.

New guy was in the exact middle of his cell, and he was standing a good foot off the ground.

“What can I say, Marty,” the new guy said in his soft croak, and before he continued his body began to tilt until he seemed to be lying on an invisible bed nearly five feet off the ground, and then back over so he might have been standing on his head. “My lover just turns my whole world upside down.” When he went quiet, the new guy’s body began a weird kind of dance, his limbs jolting and shuddering in strange directions and after a few moments of that he began laughing, a low chuckle that evolved into a loud barking cackle.

Leland wanted to look away, from the edge of the window he could see Marty sitting with his back to the bars and his hands pressed over his ears, but he felt frozen in his own skin.

Abruptly, the new guy flipped horizontal and flopped heavily onto the cot. He gave a few more breathy laughs and then, to all appearances, simply fell asleep. Seconds later, four guards came running in, duty belts rattling, and stared at the cell in confusion. They muttered to each other for a moment, peered at the new guy fast asleep and snoring quietly, and then went rattling away again.

Leland didn’t sleep that night, and neither did Marty, both sat with their backs to the corner of their cells, blankets pulled to their chins, and stared into the reflection of the guard room window.

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Will found he was given even more space the next day to his private amusement. His ribs ached from where Hannibal had tickled him. The guards told him that he didn’t have to go to the yard if he didn’t want to, but if he didn’t he would have to stay in his cell.

Men from the next section of cells had to walk by him to get to the outside and Will saw more than one hasten has pace outside his cell door.

It was good instincts really, since he was actively talking to Hannibal as they walked by, hunched over the makeshift Ouija board and the planchette Margot had mailed to him, but they didn’t know that. They were just running from a skinny kid and his piece of paper. It made Will’s lips curl, not quite a smile not quite a snarl.

Hannibal breezed through the cell, a frigid blast of air that made Will shiver, and he glanced up at the mirror. Hannibal was looking over his shoulder and Will twisted around to see a flighty looking man with a scraggly beard staring at him. Will stared back.

“They say you got powers, man,” the guy said shuffling into the cell. Will stared harder, willing the man to feel his desire for solitude through his expression alone.

“Listen man,” the guy said, moving closer to Will’s bed like he wanted to sit. Will uncrossed his legs so there wasn’t room. The guy cleared his throat. “Listen,” he started again, “I can get you whatever you want, you put a curse on this bitch I-”

Will cut him off with a firm “no.”

Hannibal had a much harder time acting during the day, so Will would never ask him for help in the daylight hours, but he would have loved to casually start “floating” right then.

Hannibal was all but grinning in the mirror and Will stared fondly a second too long. The guy flicked his gaze from Will to the mirror and back uncertainly. Will decided to use this in his favor.

“The spirits don’t know you, they know me,” Will intoned. Usually he worked to keep his voice from being too creepy and it was powerfully liberating to just let it be, a low whisper that rumbled in his throat and hissed at his teeth. The guy started backing towards the door.

“If you want help from spirits,” Will went on, “ask them yourself.”

The guy blurted out “can I borrow your board then?”

Will glanced in the mirror and saw Hannibal with his hand on the guy’s neck. The guy coughed and scratched at his collar.

“Sure.” Will agreed glacially, still looking the mirror. Hannibal arched his brows at him. “But come back tonight. It’ll be easier for a novice.” Hannibal, catching on stuck his intangible fingers through the guy’s eyes. The guy must’ve felt something because he slapped a hand to his head and hunched his shoulders. Will watched him back out of the cell blubbering thank yous and returned to his conversation.

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Sarah shifted in her horrible chair, clicking through the monitors before returning to her paperwork. Count and evening lockdown was soon, and she wanted to get her work done before that happened so she wasn’t playing catch-up all evening.

There was a knock at the open door and Sarah spun the horrible chair with its horrible squeak, instinctively reaching towards her TASER. She didn’t unbuckle it from the holster, she just felt better with it close at hand, especially after last year’s riot.

Elden Stammets, waiting on sentencing for growing a fuck ton of coca for the local cartel boys, was at the door, his shirt color spotted with blood, face white as a sheet. Sarah startled. “Stammets, what happened to you?” she sputtered already reaching for the incident report form in its green folder.

“New guy threw me,” Stammets muttered, his voice was worryingly thick and Sarah set the form aside to radio for medical.

“Which new guy, Stammets?” Sarah asked as Stammets went, somehow, even paler.

“Graham,” Stammets muttered back and he leaned hard against the door and slid to the floor, unconscious. Sarah ran forward, left hand still comfortable at her TASER, and felt for a pulse. When she was confident it was there and strong, she radioed the other guards on shift for assistance with an incident, “a capital I incident, okay,” she told them.

Walter and Jesse turned up fast enough for all their guts hung over their duty belts, and she sent them off to talk to Graham. Medical turned up after them and away Stammets went on their little orange gurney.

Sarah went back to her horrible chair and rolled back the evening footage. Graham’s cell was right behind her and she couldn’t believe she wouldn’t have heard a fight. She believed that skinny little freak could throw six foot five Stammets any real distance even less. The footage from the camera that recorded the hall outside Graham’s cell cued up and Sarah scrolled forward to an hour earlier.

There was Graham sitting on his cot, like always, reading his letter, like always. Sarah knew from patrol that Graham’s nearest neighbors hadn’t been in their cells. Leland was off at the card game everyone swore didn’t take bets and Marty was in the gym.

Thirty minutes before the current time, there was Stammets walking nervously to Graham’s cell. Graham got out of the way, completely non-hostile, and Stammets sat on the bed opposite him. They started playing some weird game with the letter, hands moving in unison over the paper.

Then Stammets, not Graham, started getting frustrated and gesticulating aggressively. Graham, bizarrely, glanced over his shoulder at the mirror in his cell. The kid was freaky but Sarah couldn’t see anything that looked like a typical altercation scenario from his end.

Abruptly, Stammets shot up off the bed as if he’d jumped. He jumped off the bed a few more times, the final time striking his head on the ceiling, and then his next jump took him straight out of the cell to fall hard in the hallway. The entire time Graham watched, completely motionless, with a neutral, bemused expression.

“What the fuck,” Sarah breathed, scrolling the recording back to watch again.

Walter and Jesse came strolling back into the guard room and came to stand behind her. “Graham says he doesn’t know what happened, he didn’t like their little Ouija game and freaked out,” Walter told her in his usual faux-cowboy cadence.

“Sure what it looks like,” Sarah agreed.

“That kid is weird, though,” Jesse offered, leaning on the desk just as the footage began replaying Stammets jumping on the bed.

“I just can’t believe we didn’t hear him hit the wall,” Sarah said, jerking her thumb over her shoulder at the wall shared between the guard office and the hallway outside Graham’s cell. “Look,” she said, pointing at the screen, “he doesn’t land gentle.”

“S’thick concrete,” Walter said unconcerned.

“Cocaine does weird things to a brain,” Jesse turned as he spoke, already on his way back to patrol, “just fill it out as self-inflicted and call it a night.”
“You think we should give him a night in quarantine just to be safe?” Sarah asked.

“Nah,” Walter drawled, “the computer systems over there are still fucked. Repair guy’s comin’ tomorrow or the next day, but right now s’not ‘fit for occupation’. Y’know, case we decide to start beating the inmates.” Sarah laughed along with him and waved him off before turning and marking the “self-inflicted” box of the incident report.

-x-

Will was left to himself after the incident with Stammets.

Days passed slowly, large chunks devoted to Will’s sleepy expeditions through his own imagination. Early the next week, he received a thick envelope from Margot. He opened it, and out fell a slim black journal with a post-it on the cover reading “I think I’m supposed to send this to you.”

Will bent back the front cover and read:

June 21, 1950

I have had Margot Verger as a client for several years. She has reached her middle teenage years and the situation with her brother has become quite intolerable.
“Hello, Hannibal,” Will whispered smiling delightedly at the journal. Someone walked down the short hall to the yard, opened the door, and a short gust of air wound through the cells, lifting the hair on Will’s neck. It probably wasn’t Hannibal, he thought, but he could pretend.

I visited Ms. Verger in the hospital today. She had been attacked, she told me, by a man hired by her brother. She could not offer any proof besides having recognized his voice and build. The attack had left a deep gash across her lower stomach and she told me in a whisper that she had been pregnant and was sure she was not now.

Without the text here was blacked out, but without the determination in earlier volumes, and by tilting the page Will could clearly read “Matthew”. *Without Matthew I have often thought of offering to marry her myself. But neither of us would be happy. The farce would weigh on our minds and she would get no child. At least she would have my money if she could not get her brother’s. Still it is a thought unborn, left to fester in my thoughts.*

“That’s a horrible allegory,” Will whispered to the journal. By instinct he glanced towards the mirror, but it was still daylight and he saw nothing in the glass.

Will turned the page.

July 1, 1950

I have elected to hold a dinner party, ostensibly to celebrate Independence Day. In reality I will be using it to invite the Vergers, and to talk to Mr. Verger on his own. I hope some

combination of my medical abilities will help me discern a working solution for Ms. Verger's situation.

July 4, 1950

No.

July 5, 1950

Mr. Verger was not amenable to private conversation. He was genial enough in front of the guests, although his humor was decidedly off color, but seemed to know exactly what I wanted as soon as I asked him to join me for a nightcap. He did not drink a drop, to my frustration, as I'm sure it would've gone much smoother if he had felt calm.

My conversation with Mr. Verger essentially amounted to him informing me that he suspected I had disingenuous intentions towards his sister, alternatively, towards himself. He told me I hadn't done a thing for her mental state and she was more combative than ever.

He finished by smashing his crystal tumbler on the floor and storming out of the house, slamming the door to the porch as he went.

I hope to find another way to confer with Ms. Verger as I fully expect he will be withdrawing her from my care.

August 14, 1950

I happened to bump into Ms. Verger at a wine festival. We have arranged regular dinners, to my immense relief.

The call for dinner sounded and Will tucked the journal inside his jumpsuit. His planchette and makeshift Ouija board lived inside his suit as well. He has purposefully alienated himself from the other inmates; he couldn't rely on their respect for his space as he could their respect for himself.

Will ate quickly so he wouldn't have to taste anything, and then shuffled back to his cell while most of the others clustered around the horrible TV to watch their horrible shows. As he walked, Will came upon a civilian, not one of the inmates or staff, being escorted by two guards. He wore a blue jumpsuit stamped with the logo for "Baltimore Electrical" and carried a tool kid. He shied back comically far as Will passed.

Will figured it would be approaching evening, so he got the planchette and Ouija board, or rather his Ouija paper, and sat on his dismal cot reaching out for Hannibal.

He got no answer so Will flopped back, staring aimlessly at the omnipresent light in the ceiling.

The light flickered, once, twice, and then went dark.

Shouts rang out from the common area and Will could hear the guards shouting. A scant few seconds later, backup lights came on, staining the hallway a spectral blue. Will shuffled up to

the bars, peering out his door and into the hallway.

Two guards burst from the central hub, running for the common area. As they passed one grabbed Will's door and manually dragged it shut, the other yelled at him to "stay put and don't do anything stupid."

Will turned around to return to his cot when he saw movement in the mirror. Hannibal was there with a finger over his lips. Will put a hand over his mouth to show his compliance. Hannibal smiled and beckoned to him. Will stepped up to the mirror and Hannibal pressed a hand to the glass. Will matched him, smaller hand against his side of the mirror more or less lining up with Hannibal's.

Hannibal's lips moved as if he were speaking, but Will couldn't hear the words, even in his mind as he had at the house, but he got the impression of a question being asked of him. He shrugged helplessly and Hannibal frowned, focusing hard enough to pinch the skin around his eyes. He spoke again and this time Will could make out "favor" and "me". He nodded, not entirely sure what was being asked but eager to help somehow.

Will felt something grab his hand, as if Hannibal had laced his fingers through Will's and then a sharp pull. He felt something brush by him, as if he were trying to squeeze past someone in a narrow hallway, and then Will was alone in the cell.

Not quite alone as it turned out, he felt a hand on his shoulder and he was turned and propelled towards the cell door. The door clicked loudly and slid open sluggishly. Will stepped out and was turned to his right, towards the door to the guard room. Hannibal lead him right up to the door and Will pulled the sleeve of his uniform over his hand and tried the nob. It turned, and Will slipped into the dark guard room.

The monitors that lined the room were running on emergency power, but only error messages showed on the screen, "error no feed" they read. Hannibal hurried him on before he could study more of the room and he found himself leaving the room and walking down the hall that was twin to the walk from processing he'd walked down when he'd arrived.

They continued into another guard room looking into a waiting room. The door to the rest of the building had been left open and Will saw several angry alarm lights flashing on the desk console. Hannibal hurried him on into the rest of the building. How he knew the layout Will couldn't guess but he seemed to know exactly where they were going.

After a few odd turns, Will found himself outside a steel door bearing a placard reading "Evidence". He tried the knob and found it locked, but a cold chill ran through him and he heard a click and the knob gave.

Will found himself in a tiny office. A police officer was bent over a desk with a battery powered lantern illuminating him fiddling with a walkie talkie. Will eased the door shut ever so slowly and closed it as silently as he could. He took a step into the darkest shadow near the door and the officer straightened up, about to turn towards him.

His radio howled and the guard cursed holding it back towards the lantern to something with its many little buttons.

Again, Will felt Hannibal at his sleeve, pulling him towards the other door in the room, but he was pushed against the wall beside it and Will felt a pressure against his lips, although whether that was a kiss or an admonishment to stay quiet was hard to say.

The radio howled again and then a strange, deeply distorted voice came out of it, an oddly electronic growl. The officer stared at it perplexed but after a moment of silence the growl came again this time producing the word “backup” and “officers” and “jail.”

The officer radioed back, heard nothing in response, and went tearing out of the room hollering down the hallway about goddamn technology all the goddamn time.
The door a Will’s elbow clicked and Will shouldered it open. There were boxes of vinyl gloves by the door and Will grabbed a pair. He’d have to find a way to dispose of them securely, but he’d worry about that later.

The emergency lights in the evidence room cast long eerie shadows as they filtered through the aluminum racks and crates. Hannibal lead him through the skeletal forest of storage furniture, and Will found his hands lifted up towards a cardboard box marked with a string of numbers.

Will hauled it down and opened it to find a bunch of obscure items in baggies, and one plastic wrapped katana. He lifted it out and Hannibal took it. To the naked eye, the katana was floating a few feet off the floor. Will put the box back just where he’d found it, careful to keep it at its original odd angle with the boxes on either side of it. Figuring they had gotten what they’d come for, Will started back for the office. The power outage would be over any time now and if he was found gone from his cell there would be real trouble.

As he reached the door, he heard a small scraping noise, a soft thump, and then a sharp cracking nose. Turning, Will strained against the glare of the emergency lights but could see nothing. The door before him clicked and Will opened it the smallest of cracks to check that the police officer had not returned. The office was empty so Will held the door so the katana could float through.

They hurried to the hallway door and Will felt the katana bump against his hand. He took it, not thinking too hard about the significance as tried to still himself, to hear anybody in the hallway beyond. Footsteps approached a fast clip and then faded out again. The door clicked.

Hannibal lead him in the other direction this time, towards a glowing red exit sign. Will pushed it open with free gloved hand and poked his head outside. For a moment all he could do was breathe the damp night air.

He was behind the building, and the cobwebs on the railing beyond the door suggested this entrance was infrequently used. Most interesting was a deep air vent protruding from the bottom of the building. Will stepped out of his rubber jail shoes and used them to block the door open and took a few steps away from the building, then in a rough half circle around the vent. There was a definite blind spot and he slipped the katana into the vent with both his vinyl gloves.

Slipping his rubber shoes back on, Will slipped back into the police building a sprinted back towards the jail, stopping at corners to listen as hard as he could for other footsteps. A cold

wind blew by him, and the hair on Will's neck lifted. He reached the door to the guard half of processing, an utterly unmarked slab of steel, and felt a heavy pressure against his chest. The door flew open, missing his face by a fraction of an inch and a police officer breezed out talking furiously into a walkie talkie. Will slid around the door letting it's natural weight close it behind him.

Down the hall, through the monitor room and into his cell he went and soon he was back in his dark cement home-away-from-home.

Will flopped onto the cot and tried to slow his breathing. Bare moments later, the normal sickly yellow lights flickered on.

The guards led an orderly line of demurely shuffling inmates to their cells. As they passed Will's cell, the guard who had shut his door frowned at his door, which was still open. Will sat up.

"Smart, stayin' here," said the guard.

Will lifted his eyebrows at him, the picture of mild confusion.

-x-

Lydia had been working in Maryland's Criminal Forensic Analysis Lab for nearly seven years. Never had she been given such a blatantly horrible sample. The vial had contained several blonde hairs, but the vial itself had been snapped totally in half, and parts of it crushed. A hasty note had been scrawled reading "vial dropped, but floor clean and only sample. Please test anyway."

She read the note allowed and received a chorus of sympathetic "ugh"s from her fellow scientists. Nearly twenty years of schooling for this job and this is what those idiots outside Baltimore gave her? Who knows how many other genetic profiles could be in this mix of Plexiglas and keratin.

Lydia grabbed an Evidence Contamination form and didn't bother checking any boxes or writing anything besides, in bold red sharpie, "UNTESTABLE" across the form.

She dropped the sheet and the horrible sample in a padded envelope, grabbed a label for the county sheriff's office in question from the printed sheet tacked over her counter space, and set it with the day's mail.

-x-

Will sat up at the sound of his cell rattling open. The jail had been on lockdown following a fist fight in the common area for hours and he hadn't anticipated moving from his cot.

"Gettin' released Graham" said the guard, a portly older man with a magnificent moustache, "guess you really are the only innocent guy in here."

Will laughed, weakly and offered his wrists for the rubber coated cuffs. "You won't start flailin' at me, will ya?" the guard asked grinning sideways at him. Will smiled tremulously,

still not really sure this was really happening. “But you’re still gonna walk in front of me, okay?”

“Sure,” Will agreed shuffling out of the cell. “Got all your stuff?” the guard asked, taken aback. Will patted the tummy of his jail uniform hard enough to make the paper beneath crinkle. The guard nodded drably and fastened the cell door behind them. “Okay, back to processing. Gotta make sure you’re not smuggling anything out, weird as it is.”

Will stripped off the jail uniform, was given a cursory examination for contraband, and given a pile of clothes. They were his clothes, but not the ones he had been arrested in. “Attorney Verger left these for you,” said the guard, “she’s waiting in the lobby.”

Will changed, reveling in the feeling of fitting underwear and functioning pockets. He was handed another plastic bag with the clothes he’d been arrested in, and the sheet from Hannibal’s bed he had been wearing before the arresting cops had let him dress, which had, apparently, been given a once over for genetic material. The jail clerk stamped some papers, made him sign others, presented him with copies, and then Will Graham left the jail a free man.

Margot was indeed waiting for him, incongruous in her luxurious slate grey suit on the horrible orange plastic of the lobby chairs. Will offered his hand because it seemed like thing that normal human people would do in a situation like this and Margot allowed him to shake it, but her expression was decidedly unimpressed.

“All charges dismissed, with prejudice,” she told him, not without relish. “The court said that it would have been an easy trespassing case but the state wanted to harass an ‘obviously beleaguered young student in the midst of his thesis with murder charges for which there is not an iota of evidence’”.

“Does that mean that even if they did turn up something obvious they couldn’t prosecute?”

“That’s right,” Margot agreed, walking him out of the jail lobby. Will turned towards the evidence room. Margot hesitated and then followed him at a slower clip. “But,” she told him quietly, “don’t let anything show up.”

“Yeah,” Will agreed laughing. “Sorry there’s something I want to check, do you mind if we go out this way?”

“No,” Margot agreed slowly.

“Oh,” Will said abruptly stopping in the corridor. “I don’t have a place to stay.” He had let his lease with the student dormitory slip, it had been an unnecessary expense when he couldn’t suffer going back there for even a night.

“I thought we might talk about that at my office,” Margot supplied. Will turned to face her. She had the barest flicker of a scheming grin, the merest twitch on her lips, but in her typically glass-smooth poker face, it was as good as a pantomime.

Will turned and continued down the hallway. They pushed through the exit door and Will stopped after descending the cement steps. Once Margot had stepped out and the door had fully closed behind her, Will turned on his heel and said without the slightest attempt at play acting. “Wow look at this thing I have suddenly found. It is clearly abandoned property without an owner.” He walked over to the air vent and removed the katana and the vinyl gloves he had stashed there. He palmed the gloves before Margot could see them, no need to try her conscience any more that he must have already.

Margot pointedly looked away as Will tucked the katana inside his shirt. With his hand over the hilt, it wasn’t invisible but neither was it obtrusive.

Margot lead him around the building to the parking lot and her sleek black Audi. Will perched uneasily on the edge of the passenger seat as if afraid his very existence would dirty the leather. He was driven to a nearby suburb, obviously wealthy with most of the houses faced in brick with sleek, freshly painted trim. Margot pulled her Audi alongside a bright yellow convertible and killed the engine.

Margot lead him through the front door to an airy foyer and called out “Judy? I’m with a client,” shutting the door behind him. Will followed her through a set of soundproofed doors to her office, bordered in bookcases arrayed with impressively orderly books with near identical spines.

“So,” Margot said with an amiable exhale, “about Dr. Lecter’s house.” She rounded the desk and sat in her high-backed desk chair, waving to one of the shorter arm chairs opposite the desk. Again, Will perched on the extreme edge of the seat, he set the katana across his lap the compromise between his uncertainty as to whether it was more disrespectful to pretend at ownership or to lean it disrespectfully against his chair like a damp umbrella.

“I think it’s safe to say Dr. Lecter would, well, would’ve wanted you to have it.” She opened a drawer to the desk and withdrew a thick manila folder. “So I’ve taken the liberty of purchasing the house. I’d like to give it to you.”

“What?” Will asked. His vision faded dark at the edges and he leaned hard on his knees.

“Are you alright?”

“What?” Will repeated faintly. Dimly, as if through earplugs, he heard her get up and open the door, calling out something he couldn’t make sense of it sounded as if she were underwater. A moment later, a petite dark-skinned woman in a savagely yellow sundress breezed in with a glass of orange juice and wrapped his hands around it.

Will took a sip of the juice and the world wobbled back into focus. “Is that real?” the new woman was asking him, peering into his face. Will met her gaze with some effort. “Yes,” he told her thickly, “please don’t touch it.”

“I wouldn’t,” she agreed good-naturedly. “Do you know where you are?”

“Margot’s office,” Will replied, wondering where in medicine the woman, who he presumed was Judy, worked. “Nice to meet you,” he offered, awkwardly.

“He looks much better now, thank you dear,” Margot observed and Judy straightened up, beaming at her wife. The white of her teeth gave her dress a run for its money. “Alright I’ll leave you two to do your justice,” she laughed. She left in a searing yellow flurry.

“Your wife,” Will paused for Margot to nod her confirmation, “is very nice.”

“She is,” Margot agreed, her tone besotted even as her expression revealed nothing.

Will smiled, contemplating the tiny whirl pool that faded in and out of existence in his orange juice as his hands shook.

“Are you serious, about the house?” he asked.

“I am,” she agreed easily.

“I couldn’t repay you, not for a long time.”

“As far as I’m concerned,” she told him, pushing the manila folder towards him, “it is me repaying my debt to Dr. Lecter. I would be- well. I wouldn’t be here without him. Certainly I could never have afforded law school.”

Will drained his orange juice and set the empty glass on a cork coaster. He pulled the manila folder to him and opened it.

TRANSFER OF REAL PROPERTY AGREEMENT read the first page, then dense blocks of text and at the end a set of signature lines, several already filled in with Margot’s looping signature.

He turned the page and found a bad black and white photo of the house. Even that horrible photo made his heart jerk in his chest. He touched it faintly before turning through the rest of the pages, which offered further data about the house things that would be useful to know as Will resumed his repairs.

“I can get the electric turned on,” he said very quietly.

Margot laughed, a sound like wind chimes. “You can do whatever you like,” she confirmed.

“You should come over for dinner,” Will told her, “once I’ve gotten things really, you know, correct.”

“Send us an invitation,” Margot agreed, “only, please keep any pork on the table short.”

Will’s gaze snapped up and he studied her expression very carefully, one hand on the hilt of the katana without his conscious command. Margot remained unmoved.

“I’ll tell him,” Will said quietly. He turned back to the front page of the folder, and pulled a pen from the holder on his side of the desk, and signed and dated. Some feeling swept through him as he replaced the pen, as if something deep within him had finally slotted into place.

“Would you mind driving me home, Ms. Verger?”

Margot nodded, and rose from behind the desk.

-x-

When Will returned to the house, the first thing he did was walk around. Simple loops around the lower and upper stories, delicately stepping over and around the carnage left by the investigation team, touching things. He touched nearly every object, just to feel it and know it was there.

The only place he did not go was to Hannibal’s basement below the kitchen. Notably, it appeared the CSI team had not gone there either, because they had trashed every other room in the house but the false back to the pantry was neatly in place.

Will placed the manila folder with the deed to the house in the bedside table, on what he thought of as Hannibal’s side of the bed. He figured that’s where it ought to be.

When he had walked through enough of the house to feel the restlessness had gone out of him, Will was surprised to feel tired. It seemed like all he had done in the county jail was lie on his cot, but as soon as he stripped to his underwear and lay in the bed, he was fast asleep.

-x-

Will woke in darkness, and he woke to the feeling of nearly unbearable pressure weighing him down. He could move his fingers and toes, blink and breathe, but anything else was flatly impossible.

“Are you awake, Will?” Hannibal’s voice, and a chill in his ear.

Will breathed out hard through his nose, the best he could manage. After a moment, his jaw unlocked. “Yes,” he agreed. His voice was thick but the fog of sleep was entirely gone. “And are you amenable?” Will’s pulse was raising, he could feel that his pupils were blown wide as much from pleasure as the darkness.

“That’s good,” Hannibal said, close to his ear, “because you keep taking things that don’t belong to you and I thought we should discuss it”. Will felt hands skating over his ribs, cinching in his waist and then smoothing over the curve of his hips. At some point in his sleep his underwear had been removed, or had stopped existed, or something else, Will’s couldn’t hold his thoughts long enough to consider them.

“I found this very interesting document in the nightstand,” he informed Will, and Will felt something soft creeping over his wrists. Both of Hannibal’s hands were still trailing along the muscles of his thighs so it was moving on its own.

The tie around Will’s wrists snapped tight, pulling Will’s arms from his sides and back over his head to the limit of their comfortable range, forcing his ribs to strain with each breath. His ankles were held fast by Hannibal at the foot of the bed and he lay stretched like a canvas over the bed.

“Do you know this house no longer belongs to me?” Hannibal asked Will. His tone was conversational but distant, as if he were talking to a friendly acquaintance rather than his lover. Is that what we are, Will wondered.

Hannibal rose from where he had pinned Will’s ankles to the footboard, but the weight remained grinding the jutting bones of Will’s heel and leg into the smooth wood. Hannibal reached up to Will’s wrists and the ties came loose, at the same time the weight on Will’s ankles let up and it was so sudden that when Hannibal bodily threw him from the bed to the floor, Will went with less resistance than the pillow that tumbled after him.

Hannibal’s hand fisted in his hair, drawing Will up to his knees and Will distantly noticed that he had somehow ended up kneeling on the pillow that had jumped ship with him. Even with the layer of cushion, the points of Will’s kneecaps dug hard into the hardwood floor and he ground his molars to keep from making noise. Hannibal shook him and Will at last yelped, mournfully, and Hannibal let go and smoothed his hand down Will’s neck.

“That’s what the paper in my nightstand tells me,” Hannibal continued with no detectable change in tone, “that this house that I bought as an immigrant to a country that hated me and lived in until I died,” he strode to the bed and lifted the length of rope that had apparently held Will from where it lay on the sheets before turning to look back at Will, who had remained dutifully motionless on the pillow, “no longer belongs to me.”

Hannibal crouched down in front of Will and held the rope out to him to see. “Yes?” he asked softly. Will nodded, jerkily, unable to speak for his racing heart. Hannibal began an elaborate pattern of knots that began with Will’s wrists around the opposing forearm behind his back.

The position pulled at his shoulder joints, forcing his ribs to bow out in a way that made Will’s breath come a little shorter. His head felt fuzzy and warm, he was acutely aware of each miniscule contact of Hannibal’s body with his own and each place Hannibal’s cold fingers touched seemed to leave some energy behind them to sparkle in Will’s skin.

Somehow the ties around Will’s wrists were looped down and around his ankles and Will’s neck was involved somewhere; and when Hannibal finished there was not an ounce of movement allowed to Will. He could open his jaw and close his eyes but he could not so much as wriggle without the soft rope around him digging into his flesh so fiercely he couldn’t bear to sustain it. The pressure from the ropes and the memory of Hannibal’s glancing touches had made Will hard.

Hannibal had gone on talking as he worked, explaining his years of service as a doctor, the horrific discrimination he’d faced, how bank after bank had tried to sneak the price on this house ever higher. In any other scenario it would have been horrifying, Will had read the journals but to hear it from Hannibal’s own lips made it so much worse. But because had surrendered his movement and clothing while Hannibal roved freely around him and appeared to him fully clothed.

He stood when he’d finished his elaborate web of knots around Will and regarded him clinically.

“I could do anything with you right now,” Hannibal observed and Will’s cock twitched. His spine felt like it was vibrating beneath his immobilized flesh. “You could,” Will agreed.

“And why is that?” Hannibal asked him patiently.

“It’s your house,” Will said, catching on. Hannibal didn’t answer, but smiled without any warmth behind the expression. He walked behind Will, shoes clicking loudly on the floor and Will knew by now it was because Hannibal allowed them to because when Hannibal wanted to be silent Will would never hear him. Hannibal’s hands carded through his hair and slid down Will’s checks, thumbs curling around the points of his cheekbones.

Will’s head was pulled back by the structure of his binds. Hannibal crouched behind him, resting his chin on Will’s shoulder and wrapped an arm around Will’s throat, obstructing his air supply ever so slightly. In combination with the way Will’s shoulders were forced back, Will quickly grew lightheaded.

From a far away place, Will felt Hannibal’s other hand rake sharp fingernails over his taut stomach. Will’s muscles clenched reflexively and Hannibal laughed softly in his ear. “Anything at all, William.”

“If that’s what you want,” Will said faintly, his adam’s apple bobbed uncomfortably between his windpipe and Hannibal’s forearm.

“You have a better idea?” Hannibal asked, and nipped at the cartilage of Will’s ear.

“Yes,” Will said dazedly, utterly unable to ask for what he wanted. He let his jaw fall open and licked his lips. He rolled his eyes towards Hannibal but couldn’t make out his expression at the bad angle in the dark bedroom. Hannibal was playing along though, his fingers feathering across Will’s slick lips.

Abruptly, Hannibal was standing in front of Will, the placket of his trousers immediately in front of Will’s face. Pressing against the ropes that pulled his chest and head back, for all the barest movement it bought him, Will pressed his face to the fabric. He couldn’t really get his mouth to the fabric, so settled for moving jaw and nose. Hannibal watched him dispassionately.

“Please,” Will choked out.

Hannibal took pity on him and unfasted his trousers and held his cock out for Will. Will pressed as close to it as he could, but barely managed to brush his lips against the head. He strained with his tongue and Hannibal watched with the faintest amusement in his expression. Will stretched his tongue as far as it would go, bringing a sharp ache to the muscles in the bottom of his mouth.

Will laved and flicked and for his effort he thought he actually tasted something of Hannibal, but it was far from satisfying. Thankfully, Hannibal lost patience and, setting one hand on Will’s head, pressed his hips forward until Will could seal his lips around him.

Will lost himself in the weight of Hannibal on his tongue and the sensations in his mouth and the hand in his hair. When Hannibal finished, nothing splashed on Hannibal's tongue and Will felt abruptly and profoundly disappointed.

Hannibal set himself to rights and then knelt by Will to undo some of the ropes. Every so often he would be distracted and press a kiss to Will's shoulder or his cheek. The ropes gave but Will was still largely immobile, able only to move his head and separate his thighs from his calves. Hannibal took advantage of this to pick him up, bridal style Will noticed through the fog of arousal, and set him on the softness of the bed. Will remained sitting just long enough for his arms to be freed but the strain of the position they had been in made them utterly useless to Will.

With Will lying flat, Hannibal set to undoing the other knots, starting at his feet and moving painfully slowly up his body. Wherever the knot came loose, a tingling rush of blood flooding the skin there, trying to remedy the deformed shape of his flesh. When Hannibal reached his hips, Will felt as though his legs were on fire but still Hannibal wouldn't touch his cock, skimming his fingertips teasingly close but ultimately settling in the crease of his thigh glancing away and working on a knot by his ribs.

Had Will been able to focus, he might have noticed that none of the knots were particularly complicated and certainly didn't require the amount of time Hannibal allocated to each one, but Will felt so keyed up he was almost floating out of his own skull. Hannibal got the last knot free. Nothing was restraining Will but the sensation of burning blood under his skin and the ache in his muscles. He was so incredibly hard he felt he might lose his mind. He tried to reach for himself, but his arms were so heavy the best he could manage was a light twitch of his fingertips. Hannibal surveyed him dispassionately.

"Please," Will croaked. Hannibal grinned, and something about his nature in the darkness made the sharpness of his teeth stand out brightly against the dim shape of his body. He gave Will one firm stroke from root to tip and Will came. He didn't think he blacked out, but he certainly lost conscious awareness for awhile, drifting vaguely through his utterly empty head like a maple seed.

As if through water, Hannibal's voice reached for him, pulling him back to his body. "Do you know the human mind uses much of the same structures to communicate pain and pleasure?" Hannibal asked him. He was rubbing Will's calves with some floral smelling salve. Will's whole body still tingled faintly from the combination of being tied, his skin returning to its usual shape, and the salve Hannibal rubbed in. He hummed in answer, in a way he hoped sounded interested. He was interested, he was also utterly physically overwhelmed.

"When those structures are excited, the two things can become confused," Hannibal continued, lifting Will and tucking him beneath the covers. "It's something you enjoy," Hannibal half asked, half informed him. "'s nice," Will agreed blearily. Hannibal laughed, low and dim.

Hannibal slid into the bed next to him and Will tucked himself tightly against Hannibal's side.

"I know it's not really my house," Will whispered in the following silence.

“It is your house, my dear, I’m not really upset with you,” Hannibal whispered back.

“Both?” Will whispered back. In his head the response made perfect sense and he fell asleep smiling.

-x-

The next day Will set to work on the house. Hannibal agreed to having electricity restored to the house so long as Will didn’t use too much of it after dark. Apparently it made Hannibal feel “fuzzy”. So Will called up the power company and had the power turned on. Plumbers and septic tank technicians were called and Will wrote to the storage company that had his father’s belongings and had them ship some of the power tools to him. The work went quickly after that, too quickly as it turned out because a week later, Will caught a cold.

Hannibal confined him to bed. And Will poked weakly at his laptop for as long as his head permitted him to focus and spent the rest of his time staring blearily at the ceiling or sleeping for great swathes of time. Hannibal appeared dutifully by his side every night, perched in a low-backed armchair with one of his books.

After a few day’s rest, Will’s mind began to retain focus even as his limbs remained shaky and easily tired. When Hannibal appeared when the last of the sun’s rays slipped below the tree line, Will turned to him and asked “tell me what happened with Mason Verger.”

“Let’s see,” said Hannibal smoothly, leaning back like a parent dreaming up a tale for their sleepy child. Will laughed and Hannibal winked so fast Will nearly missed it.

“You left off during my account of 1950 didn’t you?”

“In August,” Will agreed.

Hannibal hummed and then began, “well, Mason was quickly deteriorating. Our plan for regular dinners barely made it a month. Margot was feeling desperate, quite reasonably I’m sure you’ll agree. Eventually she decided she would become pregnant and do her best to escape Mason’s attention until the child was born.”

Hannibal paused, significantly. Will coughed, breaking the apprehensive tension in the dark bedroom.

“She failed. Mason had an abortion performed upon her. She ran away, once she was well enough. She came here, eventually, begging to live in my house.” Hannibal turned and looked at the bedroom door which rested several inches ajar. “She did, for a time, in the far bedroom. We thought it would only last until we could devise a plan to obtain her inheritance money.” He turned back to Will with a wan smile. “It didn’t suit her. She hated feeling dependent. We never did come up with a plan and eventually she became so frustrated she gave up on the thing entirely and decided to make her own fortune. I convinced her to let me pay for her schooling, no small task, and she agreed on the condition that it was a loan, complete with an interest rate.”

“Worked out well,” Will muttered reflecting that Hannibal had died in 1952.

“For her, certainly,” Hannibal allowed amiably. “Although I still regard it money well spent. She was the top of her class in Columbia last I’d heard.”
Will fumbled his phone off the nightstand and meandered around google. “Graduated in the top 5% of her class,” he read blearily, “one of the only woman to work at Fuller and Laurentis, argued in the Supreme Court.” He set the phone back on the nightstand.

“Money well spent,” Hannibal repeated, his tone noticeably warmer.

“I promised we’d invite them to dinner when I have the house back together,” Will told him. Hannibal brightened, Will squinted trying to determine how much was his fevered perception and how much was Hannibal’s ethereal abilities. “How many courses may I subject you to my dear?” he asked.

“No more than five, please. And Margot requested all meat be animal.”

Hannibal made a disappointed moue with his mouth. Will wanted to kiss it, but coughed instead.

“Hm. Very well.”

“I’m not sure Judy knows about you.” Will cautioned quietly.

“Perhaps it is better this be a private dinner then. You might invite Judy along for lunch at some point. I have missed Margot, I would like to speak with her.”

“You’ll have to teach me a lunch menu.”

“Such a shame,” Hannibal teased him with a smile.

-x-

Will was finishing up the house, leaving Hannibal to contemplate the nature of the menu he would prepare for Margot.

One evening they had a vigorous argument about the tiling in one of the bathrooms that dissolved, as it so often did, into vigorous sex. At the end of it Will wrapped himself up in the bedsheet and padded downstairs to rifle through the desk. Producing a lighter, he returned upstairs and lit the candle on the bedside table. Hannibal was still there, sitting naked in the chair between the bed and the window, but in the light of the candle Will could see he was almost entirely transparent, a thin film of color with hazy outlines.

“Is something wrong?” Will asked him, alarmed.

Hannibal looked ruefully down at himself. “My stores are beginning to run low, but I am rationing.”

“I’ll find someone.” Will promised, vehemently.

Hannibal’s eyes appear to flash in the candlelight, the way an animal’s retinas caught light in the darkness. He said nothing but rose from the chair and stalked over to Will. Every bit the

Hollywood vampire, he leaned over Will and bore him down onto the chaise lounge.

“Again?” Will asked breathlessly and Hannibal didn’t bother to answer verbally.

-x-

Will had read about the distressed traveler gambit in Hannibal’s journal. It functioned on two points, first that the traveler was inept making the victim feel secure around them, and second that the traveler was far from town meaning the victim would feel obligated to invest in the success of their rescue.

The bystander effect, Will knew, meant he would have to be isolated. When other people were around, a target felt proportionally less obliged to help someone in distress. The rub, of course, was that it couldn’t be so isolated that nobody found Will.

Will dressed every bit the pampered sugar baby. He wished he had a better car to complete the look, but relied on his soft fitted sweater in a feminine blue to pull most of the weight, and his time spent in front of YouTube tutorials learning how to make his hair look styled within an inch of its life to pull the rest. Hannibal liked his look, and had tried to keep Will in that night. Will told him it could be redone when he couldn’t check the time through the outline of Hannibal’s chest.

Will chose a mountain road a good distance from both Hannibal’s house and civilization in general. He stopped the car by the side of the road then turned on his hazard lights, popped the hood and turned off his phone.

After a good half hour the first car passed him, refusing to stop even though Will waved to them. Rude, he thought, and if the license plate number stuck in his head that wasn’t his fault.

The second car stopped, though. A raised pick-up truck, actually, out of which hopped a broadly built man going grey in his whiskers. Will hadn’t counted on a second man, but the large man was followed by a younger one Will presumed to be his son. They swaggered up to his car, chattering amiably with Will asking questions about what had happened and the work that had been done on his car.

To Will’s immense gratification, his attire worked and they visually dismissed him almost immediately, completely focused on his engine instead of him. When they asked if he had a wrench and he went to the trunk, they didn’t so much as look up to see that he had the late Matthew’s Ruger 0.38 revolver instead of a wrench.

Their bodies barely fit in the trunk but in the end they did. Will set a makeshift fuse made from a strip of the son’s shirt into the gas tank and got their abandoned truck over the edge of the road. Will waited until the truck blew, a terrific bang that belched smoke so dark it stood out against the night sky even without the orange flames for backlight, then he hopped back in his car and set off for home.

Will waited for the familiar feeling of guilt to settle low in his stomach. Instead, he thought of cooking liver in the open fireplace of Hannibal’s study and felt hungry.

-x-

With the profits from his hunt, Hannibal became more active than usual. The house seemed to come alive with him, creaks and drafts appearing where none had any business being. Oil lamps flared blue and candles wandered of their own accord through the empty air. Furniture changed places and paintings were replaced in the blink of an eye.

Will was strong-armed into reading aloud from a number of food magazines online, catching Hannibal up on sixty years of food culture and then made to use his new knowledge practicing a number of neat little appetizers and delicate cocktails. Summer was drawing ever closer and Hannibal said the invitation could not be so late as to allow him to be in attendance the entire time without being disrespectful to Margot's schedule.

Eventually Hannibal became satisfied and Will woke in the late morning to find a shopping list and an hand written invitation on heavy paper atop an addressed and stamped envelope. Will set the envelope in the mail and set about putting the finishing touches on the house.

Working together, Will and Hannibal had fitted the house with oil-fed lighting fixtures in strict accordance with Hannibal's aesthetic tastes, a call-back to the dawn of electricity when houses had been obliged to a Frankensteinian mixture of both technologies. Electric lighting had been heavily pared back, made as invisible as possible and oil lamps became focal points around the room. They were surprisingly bright when they had all been installed, but Will was glad he'd never been obliged to live by them alone.

The day arrived. Will rose to find his nicest clothes set out for him and a to-do list in the kitchen to round out meal preparations Hannibal had begun late the evening previous.

Margot arrived precisely on time. Sunlight had begun to distort into the red-orange spectrum and it set Margot's white dress aflame. She was examining the woodwork on the porch with interest. Will opened the door and stood back for her, muttering an ungraceful greeting. She smiled, all the same.

"Hannibal will be along in," Will checked the sundown timer on his phone, "about half an hour."

Will led her uncertainly through to the study as Hannibal had told him to do. "I've got to finish the food. But he's got like, these um, these cool appetizers? I'll bring 'em. But uh, he left this for you." Will indicated a journal that had been dated 2015 inside the cover. Will hadn't known it had existed before that morning and hadn't managed to resist opening it, only to find a note on an index card reading "Naughty, Will. Don't peak."

"Thank you, Will." Margot murmured, picking up the journal from the desk and seating herself in the chair closest to the flickering oil lamp. Will bustled back into the kitchen, and brought Margot the neat finger food appetizers Hannibal had taught him, before abandoning her to finish Hannibal's list.

When he returned, the sky had darkened noticeably. The house was thrown into dramatic shadow by the oil lamps and Margot was visibly unnerved. She was not sitting as Will had

left her, but standing by the large windows nursing her cocktail and staring stiffly at the abstract tree shapes etched in the blackness at the edge of the lawn.

“He’s happy you’re here,” Will said quietly and Margot turned around more quickly than her usual dignity allowed. Will kept his face smooth lest he embarrass her. “He misses parties. Not many people remain on the guest list, however.”

“I wondered if he had invited Abigail Hobbs over,” Margot said, plainly relieved at having another (living) human in the room with her. The oil lamps were kind to her face and Will imagined Hannibal was enjoying the aesthetic of the two of them.

“Abigail Hobbs? I don’t remember that name from any of the journals I’ve read,” Will murmured, pouring himself another glass of water.

“He wouldn’t have written about her,” Margot agreed. “She wasn’t a patient, she was a child he took on.”

“I didn’t know there were people he purposefully didn’t write about. He wrote about Matthew,” Will protested, pitching his voice low as if Hannibal didn’t know everything that was said in his own house.

“It was very close to the end,” Margot said, solemnly, “but it was always my impression that he did whatever he could to separate Abigail from the more unpleasant aspects of life.”

“She wasn’t a human to him,” Will mused, pensively, “because humans could be judged. Innocents, young children, were not eligible.”

Margot said nothing to that, contemplating the tiny waves and eddies in her drink, but Hannibal had evidently been listening: wind swept through the room and Margot shuddered. There was a bang and she jumped visibly. Will bit back a laugh, it seemed rude beyond belief to laugh at such a woman, but he couldn’t entirely
suppress the smile that crept across his lips.

Looking around, he found that the bang had come from a drawer in Hannibal’s wide desk which had opened so forcefully that it had left its housing and the drawer had fallen to the floor, leaving an empty black maw in the desk. Will crouched, and found a slim metal case beneath where the drawer had been. Inside, he found drawings on whisper thin paper. Away from the sun, the pages hadn’t yellowed but they had grown brittle and Will lifted the first sheet out with the barest tips of his fingers.

The paper bore a sketch of a young girl in feather light graphite.

“That’s her,” said Margot who had crept over to the opposite side of the desk giving the bookcases a wide berth.

“I should find her,” Will murmured quietly. Hannibal liked the idea, Will could tell. Across the desk, Margot froze, standing fully upright her normally excellent posture taken to the extreme, her gaze was locked on the archway to the foyer. Paying attention, Will heard Hannibal walking down the stairs and much belatedly realized that could be somewhat

unnerving for Margot. A moment after Hannibal swept into the room, resplendent in a crimson suit.

Margot leaned heavily on the desk, staring at him with her face ashen white. Hannibal nodded to her, and went to stand with Will to give her the chance to collect herself. Will smoothed a hand over Will's shoulders and then to rest demurely at Will's waist. Margot regarded them uneasily.

"Dr. Lecter," she said faintly.

"Ms. Verger, always a pleasure," he replied graciously.

"I, I hadn't realized," Margot began hesitantly, "I, you're looking well, Dr. Lecter?"

"Thank you," Hannibal said, "I've been told I'm quite cold, however, so forgive me if I don't shake your hand." Margot looked even more unsettled at that, but when Will rolled his eyes in exasperated agreement she recovered.

"Nonsense," she decided firmly and held out her hand. Hannibal took it, and pressed his lips to her knuckles. Margot remained resolute and did not visibly react in any way. "You've done wonderfully with dinner, my dear, thank you," Hannibal told Will quietly. Will shuffled, embarrassed, and Hannibal said something elegant and impressive and lead them through to the dining room.

For the most part, Will considered himself an awkward appendix on Margot and Hannibal's reunion. Will had offered, over and over, to just make the food and stay out of the way. Hannibal had insisted.

Will did his best, even seated as he was at Hannibal's right hand, to ignore the conversation that flowed first stilted then easy between Margot and Hannibal. It seemed dishonest to come by these particular secrets in this particular way, somehow, and Will tried to focus on his tongue instead of his ears. His hands had some part in creating this food, impossibly.

Margot and Hannibal seemed perfect set pieces in the tableau, their lips dark with wine and their faces made still more regal in the inconstant light of the oil lamp. Dark, sleek figures with discerning palettes. Will, beside them, with his glass of water and his ragged edges felt he interrupted the image and shrank inside himself to minimize the damage.

Will started paying attention again when Margot said "I'm sorry I wasn't there, at the end."

"You can hardly be blamed, it was quite surprising." Hannibal reassured her sipping his wine. Will stared hard at his plate, his appetite having fled.

Hannibal turned to him, apparently noticing his expression, "It was painless," he said, matter-of-factly. "One minute I had a headache, the next I was looking down at my own body on the bed."

Will shuddered, balling his napkin in his fist and setting down his fork with a sudden clatter. Hannibal's foot brushed against his leg under the table and he slid the top of his foot over the

swell of Will's calf. Margot politely ignored them, and the conversation turned light until Margot's amicable departure.

-x-

"I want to meet Abigail," Will said.

It was apropos of nothing. He was sitting with a criminology journal before a flickering fire in Hannibal's study. It was getting warmer as summer crept up on Virginia, but both men were fond of their fires and the night was dry enough to be chilly.

"When will you go?" Hannibal asked. He didn't ask how Will would find her, well used to his ability to pluck information from the empty air with the help of his smartphone.

"I don't know, Friday, maybe?" Will offered peaking over the edge of the journal at Hannibal who sat at the desk sketching. Probably he was sketching Will, which always made Will feel uncertain. He preferred not to see Hannibal's slick lipped depictions of him.

"Perhaps she would want the old drawing of her," Hannibal suggested, glancing towards the bottom drawer of his desk.

"I don't want to damage it," Will deflected. He loved that drawing, though he couldn't have explained why. Something about it was so emotionally expressive compared to Hannibal's usually coolly factual depictions of life.

Hannibal fixed him with a shrewd look and then crumpled up the drawing he was working on, flinging it into the fire. He set to work on a new sketch, his feather thin charcoal skittering feverishly across the paper.

Will was about to turn back to the article he had been haphazardly reading when Hannibal spoke again. "Do you miss your father, Will?"

"Not really," Will said faintly, blindsided by the question.

"How did he die?" Hannibal asked, still entirely focused on the sketch spinning away from his charcoal.

"A beam fell on him."

"He was a construction worker?"

"Sometimes he was. Mostly he was a drunk. If I could've afforded an autopsy in the middle of my freshman year I'm sure the medical examiner would tell me had been working drunk."

"They are his tools you are using to work on the house, aren't they?" Hannibal asked, mildly.

Will noticed that Hannibal said 'the house' more often than anything else. Once he had said 'our house' and had been so distracted when he realized that Will couldn't talk with him for the rest of the evening. Will never corrected him when he forgot and said 'my house' but it had become a point for Hannibal, apparently.

“They are,” Will agreed eventually, “and it was his drink of choice I had been drunk on when we met. What’s your point,” he asked a little too sharply. Hannibal flashed a knowing smile to him.

“It’s not my way of missing him,” Will continued, tone becoming increasingly sharp as Hannibal smiled wider.

“What happened to your mother,” Hannibal deflected demurely.

“What happened to yours,” Will shot back.

“I ate her.”

Will huffed, “sure just throw down the trump card as soon as you draw it.”

Hannibal startled and stared at him for a moment before laughing aloud, a startlingly loud noise from him and a wind whistled through the room, stirring the curtains and staining the flames of the candles beside Will a brilliant sapphire.

“You always surprise me, Will,” Hannibal told him, smudging a place in his drawing with the edge of his last finger before he set back to work.

Will huffed again, chewing on his lips. “She left when I was little. Dad never told me what happened and I never really wanted to know.”

“You can find Abigail Hobbs, who I knew for a few months as a girl in the 1950s, but you will not find your mother?” Hannibal asked him.

“No, I won’t,” Will told him firmly. “She was never a part of my life and I won’t try to wedge her into it by virtue of some vague biological connection.”

“It doesn’t matter to you,” Hannibal asked, once again focused entirely on the sketch.

“No, it doesn’t. It’s nothing I’ve repressed into my ‘heart of hearts’ or whatever. I just have no interest in her. I don’t want to know but it wouldn’t matter to me if I did.”

“Your father never remarried?”

“He was dating someone when he died,” Will answered, “how long is this round of twenty questions going to last.”

“For someone who has written multiple papers on the minutiae of my life and plans to write still more you are awfully cagey,” Hannibal pitched it as a gentle reprimand but it landed sharply and Will curled on himself, trapping the journal between his knees and chest. “Sorry,” he muttered dimly.

“It’s nothing,” Hannibal told him gently, rising from the desk, “I just don’t know all that much about you, my love.”

Will bristled at the endearment, the hairs on his neck standing up and his cheeks flushing red.

“Yeah, alright,” he agreed quietly. “It’s fine. I’m sorry.”

“You have nothing to be sorry for,” Hannibal said, “except for how late you have made us stay up. Come to bed.” Will watch him blink out of existence as he sometimes did when he was feeling energetic. He heard footsteps upstairs and scrubbed at his eyes with the heels of his hands.

Will shut the journal and set it on the end table by his favorite chair. Standing he stretched and was about to walk for the door when he stopped at the last minute and detoured to walk by the desk.

The sketch Hannibal had started was clearly of him, but it was unlike his previous flattering depictions. This Will sat in a scattering of power tools. He was wearing a much-creased t-shirt and a tattered pair of jeans and he looked absolutely peaceful.

Will tapped the paper and hurried for the staircase to join Hannibal.

-x-

Will drove into the driveway at Ms. Hobbs’ house with a crunch and crackle of gravel, dust clouds blooming behind his car. Her house was obviously old, but well loved. Chickens were milling around on the front lawn and they scattered away in a squawking heard as his car rumbled up the drive.

Will parked and peered around for a moment before he got out of the car. A creek bubbled along on one edge of the property and Will drifted towards it. Standing on the bank he felt a rush of nostalgia, remembering sitting with his father alongside the water.

Then he remembered that usually he would be drinking with his father. He wasn’t sure how to feel about that memory and pushed the thought aside.

“Rivers are good for thinking, aren’t they,” said a quiet woman’s voice behind him.

Will wrenched his gaze from the progress of the water and turned to see an older woman, maybe in her late 40s or early 50s regarding the river solemnly. She was straight backed, but without the careful elegance Margot had, more as if she were braced for sudden attack.

“We spoke on the phone,” he blurted out, feeling they had jumped right over introductions and into some uneasy preamble.

“We did,” Ms. Hobbs agreed, “you’re researching Hannibal Lecter.”

A little voice in Will’s thoughts whispered “*doctor* Lecter”. He managed not to correct her aloud.

“Yeah. I wrote my senior thesis on him and I guess I’m going to keep going with it in grad school.” In truth Will couldn’t imagine writing anything else, not for more than a single class much less for five to seven years.

She was quiet, not looking at him. After a moment, she sat down and dangled her legs off the grassy bank. Will set near her, his back up against a tree. The tree had grown into the bank and branches erupted from the ground that formed one side of the creek bed and tangled around themselves before disappearing back into the dirt.

They sat for a long time not speaking. Will thought it wasn't a bad way to spend the afternoon, the weather was pleasant and it was quiet but for the clucking of the chickens and the river water.

"I didn't know him for very long," Ms. Hobbs said eventually, kicking her feet in the river water, "only a few years before he died, but it was good. Really good," she amended, but her voice was resigned as if she felt obliged to admit to something.

"That probably sounds crazy. He was a monster," she said matter-of-factly, but a venom lurked beneath her words that put Will's hackles up. Will made a noncommittal noise.

"At the time I was just barely in grade school and my dad's mental health was getting worse. He, Lecter I mean, helped me with school. Told me I could be whatever I wanted no matter who my dad was, stuff any child needs to hear."

"Eventually," she went on, "he got me settled with a foster family. He had some contacts with the local government. I think everyone eventually wound up at one of his dinner parties."

Will cleared his throat knowing he couldn't completely stop the laugh that was struggling up his throat.

Ms. Hobbs obviously hadn't noticed because she continued on, meditative and solemn. "I think at that point he knew he didn't have long, at least subconsciously you know, so he made sure I had a family. When that one was…wasn't good…he made sure I got resettled."

See, Will thought, even your first foster parents went to one of Hannibal's dinner parties.

"Still, I got the house," Will wondered, belatedly realizing he was speaking aloud.

"It's good you did. I can tell, just from this conversation, it's important to you." Her gaze unfocused again as she stared across the river. That unsettled him, he honestly hadn't expected that she was paying any active attention to him. "I didn't even think of that, when he died, I wasn't disappointed or anything. I was still a kid, I didn't know anything..." She trailed off and laughed, self-deprecatingly.

"My foster family didn't know how to handle it. All that news came out about what he really was, all those people he killed. Police came to talk to me because someone said they'd seen me talking to him in the park often enough. My school ended up putting me in the special education program, trying to keep me away from the other kids because they were," she paused, "so awful."

"And you know," she was picking up speed now, "as I got older, even then, mental health wasn't something people talked about, getting help wasn't something you did."

She turned to him, “I’m at peace with it now, but it’s strange talking to you. Good strange, you know.”

Will muttered a vague affirmation, it was a good strange he thought even though she knew Hannibal and still understood nothing. He had wanted to ask about what Hannibal had been like, what it had been like to be around him in life. He knew now that she wouldn’t tell him anything. He resolved to enjoy the river and the weather. Her disconcertingly familiar personality was something to worry over another day.

“You said you’re going to keep writing about him?” she asked, looking at a point on his chin, Will understood, it was deeply irritating that they were so much alike.
“I think about it a lot, how someone who could do the things he…did…could be so kind to me. Could be the person who was kind to me, who really made my life what it is, after my dad.” She looked bitter and Will carefully clenched his jaw, sticking his tongue to the roof of his mouth to keep himself silent.

After a long pause, he figured he was supposed to say something about that, his apparent area of expertise. “Well,” he tried, “no single aspect of a person prevents them from having others.”

“That’s what I figured, after enough time went by after he …passed away.” Abigail agreed, somberly. The lines around her eyes seemed deeper.

“Can I describe this conversation in my thesis, well, my dissertation?” Will asked figuring he was probably supposed to.

“Would you change my name?” Ms. Hobbs asked, and the question was obviously pre-meditated even if she played it off as if it had been spontaneous.

“Yeah,” Will agreed, “I will.”

Abigail’s conversation wandered away then, into disconcertingly comforting territory concerning trees and her chickens and the river. She invited Will to stay for dinner and cooked vegan.

-x-

Dawn was imminent, Will could feel it in the chill filtering through the large bedroom windows. On the mantle sat Will’s acceptance to a master’s program in criminology, where Hannibal had insisted it sit, and told him it would only be moved when he had been accepted to a PhD program. His diploma was displayed in the study, framed in antique oak liberated from a stack in the basement.

Will’s gaze flickered back to Hannibal from the letter. Hannibal was getting hazy around the edges, Will would have to go hunting soon. He smiled. Hannibal squeezed his shoulder, seeing his smile in the mirror that sat over the mantelpiece where it reflected Will leaning against nothing.

“What if I’m not here with you?” Will asked, very quiet, “after I die?”

“I’d be surprised to learn any pair before us had gotten even this chance,” Hannibal assured him, but his voice was just as quiet.

“Something something make the best of it?” Will smiled, craning his neck back to look up at Hannibal.

“I suppose it’s the best we can do,” Hannibal agreed, and leaned forward to kiss him. “Thankfully our best has, so far, been very impressive.”

End Notes

So that's it! That's the last part. I've got an epilogue I'm working on, set some 10-20 years down the line. Ideally it'll be done by halloween. As ever, I'm more than happy to receive complaints, criticism, thoughts, recipes, accounts of your dog being adorable, whatever. I'm on tumblr under the same name if you'd prefer to be anonymous. Thank you all so very much reading!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!